

Governor's Commission to Review and Advise on Services Related to At-Risk Youth in New Hampshire

October 9, 2015
Legislative Office Building
Rooms 206-208
Concord, NH

DRAFT MINUTES

Commission Members in Attendance: Mary Ann Cooney, Geoffrey Souther, Mary Steady, Michael Adamkowski, Judge James Carroll, Michael Skibbie, Nichole Rodler, Evelyn Clark Smith, Martha Kane

Commission Members Absent: Commissioner Nick Toumpas, David Dionne, Karen Purse

Others in Attendance: Barbara Carpenter and Donald Nary of the NH Juvenile Parole Board. Betsy Hood, Director of the Nashua Youth Counsel.

I. Call to Order: Meeting called to order by Commissioner Mary Ann Cooney at approximately 11:05 by welcoming members of the Commission and guests.

II. Approval of Minutes (September 11, 2015): Chair Commission Cooney motioned for the approval of minutes and all members approved. She also cited the need for a note taker for this particular meeting and Commissioner Kane agreed to this request.

III. Update on CR Workgroup for SYSC- MaryAnn: Commissioner Cooney reported that a five million dollar reduction is necessary over the SFY16/17 biennium, and the Department has been working with the a legislative Workgroup Committee around these issues. The reduction is maintained to date. The committee will continue to work with the identified seven budget cut options, although they all appear to be as costly if not more costly than the current expense. Some examples are to close the Sununu Center, privatization of the facility, opening a psychiatric unit and staff layoffs/payoffs for this biennium. A presentation by Commissioner Tompas was heard by the Continuing Resolution workgroup for Sununu Center. It has also been established that the cost just to maintain the Sununu Center, (empty or not) was 2 million dollars. Additional buildings on the property continue to be utilized by State Police, Manchester Police Department and running the Sugar Barn, free of cost. This memorandum of agreement was established 5-6 years ago.

Commissioner Adamkowski would like an in-depth break down of the cost per youth as opposed to the cost to run the Sununu facility as a whole. Commissioner Souther seconded this request and reflected on the possibility of turning over some of the buildings to Administrative Services. Some similar changes were adopted on the State Hospital grounds and at Glenclyff.

Accepting out of state youth has previously been proposed as a means of utilizing some of the empty space and specialized programming occurring at Sununu. Governor and Counsel approved a contract for one youth. Could this Commission support an expansion on this option?

Chair Commission Cooney agreed to make the specifics of all seven afore mentioned budget options available to this Commission for further discussion and consideration.

IV. Presentation on Diversion Services in NH: Commissioner Rodler and Betsy Hood presented the Commission with an overview of Diversion Services. Ms. Hood is the Director of the Youth Counsel in Nashua, NH. There are 18 accredited programs in NH. Two existing programs are not accredited but available as community resources. Approximately 1,400 youth are seen each year, but numbers appear to be dwindling. It is speculated that part of the issue is parents not having the resources to participate in these services or have the means to make their children available. There is an 86% completion rate across the state and the fees for these services vary across the state as well. It was also represented that in Nashua, 93% of the youth that participate in Diversion services have been free of post arrests. More work and resources need to be developed to track further and outside of the “jurisdictional lines”. It was also noted that four of the Diversion programs (reflected on the provided map in the handout) had closed their doors since May of 2014.

Chair Commissioner Cooney will research the ability to pursue Medicaid reimbursement for more Diversion programming as opposed to “piece meal” post adjudication and research ability of reimbursement of cases placed on file.

Chair Commissioner Cooney asked the Commission if the topic of Federal laws pertaining to the sealing of juvenile records and Military background checks of youth should be highlighted and presented to the Governor with the goal of contacting delegation, specifically Senator Shaheen, as an area needing scrutiny as it presents multiple barriers for youth interested in joining the Military. Some of the barriers are delinquency record, mental health history and educational coding.

V. Additional Information and Commission Recommendations: Chair Commissioner Cooney asked that members give thought regarding discussion needs for next meeting. Commission Clark Smith suggests a presentation by Amy Tsoumbanos from Sununu Center.

VI. Sub Committee election for Report: Chair Commissioner Cooney presented the option of forming a sub-committee to take on the task of formulating a report for the Governor outside of the normally scheduled meetings. All members present expressed an interest in participating in this task.

VII. Public Comment: NH Juvenile Parole Board member Barbara Carpenter presented on behalf of the Board. The issues they believe contribute to barriers for success are: the law that requires youth to go before the parole board at a six month mark, that most youth have multiple previous placement failures before coming to Sununu, that the Courts tend to view Sununu as punitive rather than treatment oriented, and that the assessments tools do not accurately reflect the needs of the youth.

Commissioner Scibbie commented on the assessment tool and his understanding that NH uses correctional facilities for lower level offenders more than any other state in the US and that evidence based outcomes are very poor for these youth. He also reflected that NH keeps youth longer than the rest of the Country and this makes them worse. He also posed the question of “are we not preparing them well enough for release”? He also shared that he has requested individual lengths of stay at the Sununu Center and has not received a response to date. Chair Commissioner Cooney will obtain this information for the Commission members.

Judge Carroll reflected that it seems that round pegs are trying to be forced into square holes. Detention assessments don't provide the necessary background for informed decision. He always tries to look at the least restrictive and SYSC will always be the last option he considers. Our system "marks kids early on and they feel it".

Commissioner Scribbie believes that youth never transition well from the Sununu Center and the educational experience is majorly impacted.

VIII. Adjournment: Chair Commissioner Cooney moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and adopted, meeting adjourned.

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